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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TEL AVIV 000274

SIPDIS

CODEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#)

SUBJECT: EILAND ASSESSES THE CHALLENGES FACING SHARON AND  
ABU MAZEN FOR CODEL KERRY

Classified By: Acting DCM Norm Olsen for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: National Security Advisor Giora Eiland highlighted the following points in a January 9 meeting with Codel Kerry:

-- Israel faces three main challenges in implementing disengagement: a fragile domestic political situation, operational difficulties to evacuate thousands of settlers, and the possibility of implementing the disengagement plan without a cease-fire agreement.

-- Abu Mazen faces two main challenges: overcoming resistance to security sector reforms, and establishing a durable cease-fire that ultimately leads to the dismantlement of militant groups.

-- The differences between Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on returning to the roadmap are underestimated. While the GOI will stick to its strict position on Palestinian fulfillment of roadmap phase one obligations, the Palestinians, Eiland predicted, will likely take the position later this year that they have performed well enough on reforms and in reducing the violence to move forward to negotiations.

-- The U.S. could best contribute in the short term to promoting peace by isolating the negative influence of Iran and Hizballah in the Palestinian arena, continuing to push Egypt to secure its side of the border, and promoting the message that no compromises are acceptable in renouncing the use of terror.

-- Arab states have no interest in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which provides them an excuse for deferring reform. In Eiland's personal view, a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon could undermine Israeli interests by leaving a vacuum in Lebanon that Iran would fill.

-- The U.S. needs better intelligence to support urban operations in Iraq. Key political challenges in Iraq are the need to get Iraqis to react against foreign involvement in violence in Iraq, and the need for the U.S. to demonstrate some sort of symbolic pull-back after the Iraqi election.

END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) In a January 9 meeting, National Security Advisor Giora Eiland shared his views on Gaza disengagement, the future of the roadmap, Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq with Senator John Kerry. Also present were Senior Foreign Policy Advisor Nancy Stetson, Press Secretary David Wade, Army escort Col. Michael Barbero, A/DCM, polooff, conoff (notetaker) and NSC staff.

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Israeli Challenges to Disengagement  
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3. (C) Eiland enumerated three challenges facing the GOI as it prepares to disengage from Gaza:

-- Israeli domestic politics. In Eiland's view, the political situation in Israel has never been as critical as in the past year, with frequent crises arising. Even with the formation of a new, stable coalition, all problems will not be resolved. Since the GOI decision to disengage last spring, the Prime Minister has not had full government support. Therefore, the GOI is still needs to make a clear and explicit decision to dismantle the settlements. Kerry queried why an additional decision is needed. Eiland explained that the original GOI decision expressed only "general intent," and that an additional GOI decision is required in order to begin the actual dismantling of settlements. Stressing that while there is GOI "intent" and a general plan and timetable for disengagement, the settlers in Gaza do not yet feel that a formal decision to evacuate them has been made. The GOI could thus face legal challenges should it attempt to evacuate settlements with what the settlers would claim is insufficient notice. Saying that he understands that approximately 50% of settlers would choose to stay in Gaza, Kerry asked whether the GOI is prepared to

remove them. Eiland said it was, that the Prime Minister has "crossed the point of no return" in this regard.

-- Operational challenges. Evacuating thousands of settlers will require significant military resources. Kerry asked about reports that some within the military will refuse to participate in the evacuation. Eiland played down these reports, stating that some "reservists" have said that they will not obey orders "if" called to perform disengagement duty. Eiland commented that some people view the difficulties involved in settler removal as "the biggest challenge Israeli society has ever faced."

-- Implementation of disengagement without a cease-fire agreement. Eiland said attempts to evacuate settlers under fire may be not only difficult but "under certain circumstances, impossible." He was quick to say, however, that the GOI is fully committed to disengagement, even in light of this challenge. Though Abu Mazen might gain a cease-fire from the militant groups, the challenge would be in enforcing it.

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Challenges Facing Abu Mazen  
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14. (C) Eiland perceived two key difficulties facing Abu Mazen:

-- Implementation of security reforms. Abu Mazen faces strong opposition to the security measures he must take, and will be forced to reach compromises.

-- Need for a permanent cease-fire agreement. Abu Mazen must convince militant groups not only to accept a cease-fire, which he has failed to do so far, but also to agree to give up their weapons and be dismantled. Eiland explained that this process would have to take into account the unique characteristics of the various militant organizations. Hamas, he said, is a real cultural and spiritual movement, whose strength will not diminish should it temporarily cease violent activity. In contrast, the strength and finances of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades are based solely on violent opposition to Israel, without which, the group has "no other flag to hold." In order to convince al-Aqsa to stop the violence, Abu Mazen must compensate it for lost revenues and try to integrate its militants into the PA security forces.

15. (C) Kerry asked how long the PA would need to reconstitute its police forces. Eiland countered that this is not the real problem. PA security forces count some 30,000 members. While some of the PA security force infrastructure has been destroyed, the main capabilities remain. The "real problem" is neither a lack of capacity nor a lack of willingness, but rather a lack of "legitimacy" to act against terror, which Eiland attributed to Arafat's legacy. The PA security forces, Eiland cited as an example, have, since Oslo, arrested hundreds of Palestinians who confessed to murdering Israelis. The charges against the confessed murderers, however, stated only that they acted "against the interest of the Palestinian people," and none were punished. Most important now will be the PA response to future terror attacks against Israelis, i.e., whether it investigates, brings perpetrators to justice, and sentences the guilty for murder.

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Israeli vs. Palestinian Perspectives on the Roadmap  
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16. (C) Eiland commented that differences between the Israeli and Palestinian views of the peace process have been underestimated. Once the magnitude of these differences comes to light, the post-Arafat "honeymoon" between the GOI and PA could disappear.

17. (C) The GOI, Eiland said, accepted the roadmap only because of its sequencing, which places security first. While the GOI is now preoccupied with implementing disengagement, it is ready to return to the roadmap once the PA takes the necessary security steps. The Palestinians, on the other hand, will soon likely try to push the peace process forward toward final status issues by claiming to have met their roadmap phase one obligations. They will point, Eiland predicted, to:

-- The, by most accounts, fair and legitimate presidential election as proof of democratic reform.

-- Finance Minister Fayyad's transparency measures as proof of economic reform (quite legitimately, Eiland acknowledged).

-- The anticipated consolidation of the security forces under an empowered interior minister as proof of security reform.

-- A significant reduction in violence, if the cease-fire succeeds.

18. (C) The GOI response, according to Eiland, would be to defer political negotiation until it sees real security action on the ground. He noted that 70-80% of Israelis believe that the GOI paid insufficient attention to security in the Oslo process, a mistake that the GOI will not repeat.

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Keeping Peace Process on Track  
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19. (C) Kerry expressed concerns about both continuing settlement growth since his last visit two years ago, and the possibility that the peace process could be derailed for lack of specific target dates for settlement dismantlement and final status discussions. He asked why the GOI is reluctant to set forth its parameters for final status. Eiland reiterated that the GOI is fully committed to disengagement and pointed to the danger in taking on too many challenges simultaneously. The GOI commitment to disengagement, he argued, should convince the Palestinians that Israel will leave settlements. The GOI will not, he said, discuss final status issues now because of domestic political constraints, although "most of us" understand that final status will follow the lines of the Clinton parameters. Eiland pointed out that Sharon is the first prime minister to support a two-state solution and to commit to settlement evacuations even without a Palestinian partner. Kerry acknowledged that this was significant. Eiland said that support for disengagement could erode should the Prime Minister commit to more than this without first seeing a corresponding effort to reduce terror attacks. Kerry commended the Prime Minister for his willingness to expend political capital to try to change things. Kerry asked in what ways the U.S. can support disengagement efforts. Eiland responded that the U.S. could help to isolate outside negative influence in the Palestinian arena, specifically from Iran and Hizballah; continue to push Egypt to secure its side of the border; send the message that no compromise will be accepted in renouncing the use of terror.

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Economic Viability in Gaza/Egypt's Role  
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110. (C) Stressing the importance of an economically viable Gaza, Kerry asked about possible arrangements for facilitating trade out of Gaza, e.g., via an airport and/or a seaport. Eiland responded that the most important trade link is the Gaza ) Egypt border. If Egypt solves the security problems as it is expected to do, then Israel can exit the Philadephi strip and Gazans will be free to trade with the rest of the world. PM Sharon has indicated that discussions about an airport and naval port would then also be possible. In response to Kerry's query about what reassurance Israel needs about smuggling activity in the Philadelphia strip, Eiland commented that Egypt, in order to stop illegal activity, must send the "right message" to the leaders of the smuggling networks. Currently, he said, they receive only a warning that is not blunt enough. Asked whether Israel would have the necessary level of security following a pullout from Philadelphia, Eiland said the GOI would not need to act if Egypt assumes responsibility. Kerry queried about additional financial needs, to which Eiland replied that disengagement enjoys the full cooperation of the international community, including a large role for the World Bank, which ensures that the economic dimension of disengagement will be one of the strongest.

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Role of Arab World  
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111. (C) Eiland charged that the Arab world is not interested in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite impressions it gives to the contrary. The actions of the Arab world are "much more destructive than constructive." For example, he said that 70% of the funding and weapons used by Hamas can be traced, respectively, to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He asserted that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict suits the interests of the Saudi regime by providing an excuse to resist the democratic reforms expected of it post-9/11. Other Arab regimes likewise use the conflict as an excuse to resist reform. Kerry asked whether Eiland's analysis extended to Jordan's King Abdallah. Eiland said he had heard the King use the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an excuse for not undertaking reforms.

112. (C) Another form of regional support for Palestinian terrorism, Eiland continued, is Iranian sponsorship of terror attacks. In response to concerns about the relative quiet during Abu Mazen's term as prime minister in 2003, Iran, he said, established a special department in Lebanon, connected to Hizballah, to recruit Arab Israelis and Palestinians in order to continue terror attacks. Now 70%-80% of terror attacks originating in the West Bank are directed by Hizballah, not Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

13. (C) Alluding to press reports that Eiland has questioned whether a Syrian departure from Lebanon would serve Israeli interests, Kerry asked whether Eiland thought that the Syria Accountability Act would inadvertently provide Hizballah greater freedom to do what it wants. Eiland remarked that this is a delicate matter, but that, in his personal view, the main threat to Israel from Lebanon is not Syria, but Iran. If Syria leaves Lebanon, then Iran, whose hitherto hidden ambitions he said include control of Lebanon, could assert control.

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Iraq  
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14. (C) In response to Kerry's request for Eiland's perspective on U.S. operations in Iraq, Eiland commented that the U.S. made many mistakes after the initial military success. The good news, however, is that politicians responsible for the security situation in Iraq now understand their early mistakes. Two categories of challenges, military and political, remain. On the military side, the U.S. must find a way to obtain better, more reliable intelligence about the situation on the ground. The U.S. had not understood, prior to acting in Iraq, that good intelligence is essential for operations in urban areas. The political challenges are twofold. One is to get Iraqis to react against the foreign involvement, by Al-Qaeda and others, in Iraqi violence. He pointed, for example, to the 308 Saudis apprehended in Falluja. The second political challenge is for the U.S. to demonstrate some form of symbolic pull-back after the Iraqi elections. The elections, he said, will not change reality on the ground, but should be used by the Americans to say that the time has come to hand over authority. Symbols, Eiland said, are important, and perceptions are often much more important than reality.

15. (U) Codel Kerry did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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